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12-12-1988

### UM student selected as Rhodes Scholar

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#### Recommended Citation

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December 12, 1988

**UM STUDENT SELECTED AS RHODES SCHOLAR**

**MISSOULA --**

David Wheeler, 23, a University of Montana student from Missoula, has been named UM's 24th Rhodes Scholar.

Once a high school dropout, Wheeler majors in zoology and minors in chemistry. After he graduates this spring, he'll spend at least two years at the University of Oxford in England where he'll study the physiology of the nervous system.

Wheeler, who has a 3.92 grade-point average, was one of 32 college students nationwide chosen for the prestigious award Saturday. He's also a Watkins Scholar at UM this year and is studying the effects of genetic variation in rainbow trout.

Named for Cecil J. Rhodes, a British colonial pioneer and philanthropist, the scholarship covers the cost of travel and tuition and provides a stipend for living expenses. Since 1902 when the international program was set up through Rhodes' estate, 2,532 Americans have been selected as Rhodes Scholars.

Students, ages 18-24, are chosen on the basis of academic achievement, leadership, participation in sports, character and concern for others.

In addition to going to school and working part time at a nursing home, Wheeler is a Big Brothers and Sisters volunteer;



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works with a local group that helps the people in Rivas, Nicaragua; and has participated in demonstrations against nuclear arms. He also swims, plays tennis, bicycles and canoes.

After Oxford, Wheeler plans to work toward a joint medical and doctoral degree in medical genetics at a medical school in the United States. He's interested in neurological disorders-- particularly Alzheimer's and Parkinson's diseases--and the genetic components of diseases.

"I believe advances in medical genetics will have a profound effect on the prevention, treatment and cure of diseases," he said. "I think the work we do could have important ramifications for people around the world, especially with people like me who think advanced technology should not be available only to the economically advantaged in this country."

Wheeler's interest in diseases affecting one's mental capacity stems from seeing his great-grandmother in a nursing home when he was 9 years old. Although they had spent a lot of time together when he was younger, she didn't recognize him then.

Knowing the doctors couldn't do anything for her made him angry, he said.

"I started to work at the nursing home because I wanted to take care of people going through that kind of trauma," he said.

And Wheeler has had some trying times of his own. He dropped out of high school when he was a sophomore because he wasn't getting enough out of school.



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"The pace of learning was too slow," Wheeler said about his experience at Missoula's Hellgate High School, "and I didn't feel the atmosphere was conducive to learning."

David Wheeler worked in a local restaurant first as a dishwasher for 18 months and then as a cook for three years. In 1984 he became a student at UM after first passing the test for an equivalent high school degree.

Wheeler's father, Ron Wheeler, said he was worried for his son when he decided to drop out, but he knew how he felt.

"I had done the same thing when I was in high school," said Ron Wheeler, a Hellgate High School biology teacher. "I didn't want him to experience the pain that I went through, but it seems to have stood him in good stead."

David Wheeler says he gets his interest in biology from his father, and from his parents' example he gets his concern for others and world problems. His mother, Carolyn, is a lawyer for the Equal Employment Opportunity Commission in Washington, D.C. He also credits his academic adviser, Professor Delbert Kilgore, and his other UM teachers.

"The university has helped me a lot," Wheeler said today. "The university has a very strong program in the liberal arts. There are a lot of faculty members who have a very strong interest in the human plight, and they're very successful in transferring that to the students."

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State and weeklies/pic to newspapers  
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